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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER/HR ACTIVIST ESCAPES ATTACK

Classified By: Political Counselor Russ Hanks for reason 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The publisher of the Humanity, a critical new weekly newspaper (cir 3,000) printed in Port Harcourt and circulating in several Niger Delta States, barely escaped a violent attack by a group of armed thugs while leaving a social event on March 4. The publisher, Anyakwee Nsirimovu, had been receiving death threats for several weeks prior to the attack. He believes the threats are a result of his newspaper's articles critical of corruption as well as his human rights work including recent collaboration with New York-based Human Rights Watch. End Summary

¶2. (C) Nsirimovu, is the director of the Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL), a Port Harcourt-based human rights organization which worked closely with Human Rights Watch in compiling its recent report detailing corruption in Rivers state entitled "We Chop Fine".

¶3. (U) Nsirimovu told Poloff that he went to a social event outside of Port Harcourt and upon exiting the event in his car was surrounded by a group of armed young men. Initially, unsure of the intentions of the men, he slowed down, but when he realized that they posed a danger, he sped off. The group, armed with machetes and what appeared to be guns, tried to attack the vehicle, but only were successful in breaking the car's rear windshield.

¶4. (C) Nsirimovu said that for the last month he has been receiving threatening text messages and that he had been concerned for his safety. One particularly chilling message was "repent or die." Nsirimovu said that it was unclear whether the threats were for the critical articles in the Humanity, which regularly exposed corruption in the Rivers state government, or his association with Human Rights Watch, which released its report on Rivers State in late January ¶2007. He said the aim of his activities was to "demystify Odilli," whose grip over the state's politics is unquestioned. Several other local newspapers which have taken on the powerful governor by writing critical articles have been the targets of violence or financial inducement to change their focus. Nsirimovu said his newspaper, funded by the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED), was a critical voice of dissent and that by breaking stories long considered taboo, other publications could also begin to break the cycle of "self censorship."

¶5. (C) He said that the Odilli government has recently felt the heat of the EFCC, which evidently is investigating his activities. In addition, with the end of the Odilli administration near, the state government was going on a spending spree, he claimed, and that money was flowing freely

also in an effort to prevent impeachment of the governor.

16. (U) Although he was concerned about the threats and the failed attack, Nsirimovu plans to remain active. He heads the local Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) group of election observers, which will deploy about 500 observers across the Niger Delta during the elections in April. "I plan on being careful, but there is a lot at stake," he said. "Threats are not going to make me run away."

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